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Testimony in Support of SB 209, An Act Concerning Funding for the Reach Out and Read Program

To the Honorable Chairs:

My name is Brian Gallagher, and I serve as the National Executive Director of Reach Out and Read. I am writing in support of Senate Bill 209.

Reach Out and Read is a national organization of 20,000 pediatricians, family physicians, and other primary care providers who promote healthy brain development and early literacy skills in pediatric exam rooms nationwide by integrating children's books and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud into well-child visits. We currently serve 4 million primarily low-income children across the country.

Reach Out and Read reinforces the parent's role as the first and most important teacher, and gives parents the tools and techniques to help their children succeed. During every well-child visit from 6 months through 5 years of age, doctors "prescribe books" to children to take home and keep, and offer parents concrete tips and encouragement on reading aloud with their children.

As you know, the first five years of life offer a critical window for learning, with rapid brain development that does not occur at any other time. By the age of 3, children from low-income families hear roughly 30 million fewer words than their more affluent peers. And, research on early brain development shows that healthy, positive bonds with primary caregivers are essential for the brain to develop normally.



Fifteen peer-reviewed, published studies prove Reach Out and Read's efficacy. During the preschool years, children served by Reach Out and Read score three to six months ahead of their non-Reach Out and Read peers on vocabulary tests, preparing them to start school on target. In addition, parents who participate in our program are four times more likely to read aloud regularly with their young children.

Due to the fact that pediatricians volunteer their time and we operate within the existing healthcare infrastructure, the program is incredibly cost-effective-- only \$20 per child per year. The cost of the program includes brand new, high-quality children's books which we purchase through the National Center; bulk purchasing and long-standing partnerships with publishers allow us to purchase high-quality children's books at 30-80% off list price.

Funding through the State of Connecticut will allow us to create a strong private/public partnership, as we have in 15 other states that provide public funding for Reach Out and Read. Specifically, we will use state funding to leverage private donations, and match every public dollar with private donations from individuals, corporations and foundations.

I respectfully request that the Children's Committee support this important bill, and I thank you for your commitment to children's issues.

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